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THE FADING OF DEVELOPMENT PARTICIPATION IN SUMBERSUKO VILLAGE

Pietra Widiadi^{1*}

¹Postgraduate Program, University of Merdeka Malang

*Corresponding author: widiadi Pietra@gmail.com

Abstract.

Sumbersuko Village, located near Malang City, reflects the dynamics of cultural transformation in Javanese rural communities. Traditionally, this village maintained strong kinship and social cohesion through *soyo*, a ritual of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) that embodies the values of *guyub* (togetherness) and *rukun* (harmony). However, over the past decade, participation in *soyo* has significantly declined. This study aims to explore the changing nature of *soyo* as a social ritual and its implications for community solidarity. The analysis is based on qualitative field observation and participatory engagement within Ngemplak Hamlet, where familial ties remain strong yet cultural practices have weakened. The findings indicate that the decline of *soyo* is driven by occupational shifts from agriculture to urban labor, limited community interaction time, and the fading enforcement of social norms and sanctions. As a result, the weakening of the *soyo* symbolizes a broader erosion of collective identity and traditional values within Javanese society. This study highlights the urgency of cultural revitalization and adaptive community participation to preserve local wisdom as an integral part of sustainable social development

Keywords: *Soyo*, Javanese culture, mutual cooperation, local wisdom, social participation, community solidarity

1. Introduction

Sumbersuko is a village located near Malang City, approximately 15 km away. Its community is generally described as suburban, but in practice, its livelihoods mainly rely on agriculture and farming. The village is situated at an elevation of 800–1,000 meters above sea level, and nighttime temperatures can reach as low as 18 degrees Celsius. Overall, the condition of the village resembles that of other areas in Wagir District, Malang Regency, on the eastern side of Mount Kawi. The village is divided into six hamlets, or sub-villages, each with distinct characteristics despite being part of the same community.

Typically, the residents and households in the village maintain familial connections, even between different hamlets. Generally, each hamlet consists of large extended families with shared ancestry, often traced back to a common ancestor. For example, in Ngemplak Hamlet, which has its own unique history and was originally established by a single individual, the community has grown to approximately 100 households, spread over around 20 hectares. The villagers believe that their great-grandparents established this hamlet, referred to as "*bedah krawangan*," with a sacred site, *punden* Sentono, located on the north side of the hamlet.

The hamlet is located between two other hamlets on separate hills within the village: Glagah Ombo to the south and Kenongo to the north. Positioned approximately 1 km from the village center, Ngemplak Hamlet spans a length of about 1 km. Sociologically, these three hamlets each display unique characteristics, or subcultures, within the Sumbersuko Village.



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Situated between two other hamlets, Ngemplak stands out for its smallest land ownership, with most of the land belonging to the late Mr. Sidik's family, who passed the land on to his son, Sumarlik, whose husband now serves as the neighborhood head.

Nearly all the land in Ngemplak Hamlet belongs to the Sidik family. This family, once considered wealthy, still retains a significant portion of its land, although some parcels have been sold to other households in the area. Socially, there are no new residents in this hamlet, except through marriage with Ngemplak residents. Only one individual is completely new to the hamlet and has no family ties.

The strong familial bonds are evident in a social ritual that still exists, called *soyo*. *Soyo* is a form of social connection that has endured over time; however, in the past decade, participation in this activity has gradually declined. Five years ago, *soyo* was still actively practiced, but since then, it has become increasingly rare. This ritual, which Geertz (1980) described as a long-standing, routine activity in Javanese cultural life, reflects how social cooperation and symbolic participation maintain community harmony and order (Geertz, 1980; Suwignyo, 2019).

In many Javanese communities, such practices reflect the enduring philosophy of *gotong royong*—mutual cooperation based on reciprocity, trust, and kinship (Basir & Prajawati, 2021; Magnis-Suseno, 2003; Prasetyo, 2022). However, modernization and the shift from agrarian to urban livelihoods have led to a steady decline in such communal traditions (Lukiyanto & Wijayaningtyas, 2020; Suwignyo, 2019). The fading of *soyo* participation thus symbolizes a broader transformation of rural society, where social cohesion and collective participation are gradually replaced by individualistic tendencies driven by economic change and urban influence (Adi, 2013; Rahyono, 2017).

2. Characteristics of the Javanese Cultural Society

Javanese cultural society encompasses the communities living on the island of Java, especially in Central Java, East Java, parts of West Java, and Yogyakarta. Javanese cultural traits have been passed down through generations, including customs, values, norms, language, beliefs, arts, and traditions. These characteristics trace their roots back to the long history of Java's kingdoms, including Medang, Tumapel, Majapahit, and the later Islamic Mataram period (Magnis-Suseno, 2003).

Today, the Javanese cultural society is not limited to Java but has spread globally, even to places like Suriname. Thus, Javanese culture cannot be claimed as the exclusive property of a small community but rather as a widespread cultural heritage. This analysis focuses on a smaller scope in the eastern slopes of Mount Kawi, encompassing several villages that still uphold traditional Javanese cultural rituals, including *soyo*.

Javanese culture. Although some of these characteristics may not seem entirely relevant today, it's still worth examining the following traits (Koentjaraningrat, 1994):

1. "Alon-alon waton kelakon" (Slow but sure)
The Javanese prioritize patience and calmness. They believe in the saying "alon-alon asal kelakon," meaning to take things slowly as long as the goal is achieved.
2. Politeness and Friendliness
Javanese people are known for their politeness and friendliness. They tend to choose words carefully, use euphemisms, and avoid open conflict. Courtesy and humility are highly valued, especially when interacting with elders and respected figures.



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3. Hierarchical Social Stratification
Javanese society places a strong emphasis on respecting hierarchy within families, communities, and organizations, with a particular emphasis on honoring elders and leaders.
4. Mysticism and Spirituality
Javanese culture encompasses unique spiritual beliefs, known as "kejawen," as well as various other spiritual practices. This philosophy encompasses teachings and rituals related to the universe, achieving balance in life, and cultivating inner peace.
5. Ceremonies and Traditional Rites
Many Javanese traditions have spiritual and social aspects, such as "selametan" (thanksgiving), "nyadran" (grave pilgrimage), and various life-cycle rites like "mitoni" (the seven-month pregnancy ritual), "tedhak siten" (ceremony for a child's first step on earth), and death rituals. These ceremonies aim to preserve culture and connect the community to higher values.
6. Traditional Arts
Javanese arts, such as wayang kulit (shadow puppetry), gamelan (traditional music ensemble), Javanese dance, and batik (textile art), play a crucial role in Javanese identity, serving not only as entertainment but also as a medium for moral instruction and philosophical reflection.
7. Local Wisdom and Myths
Folktales and myths are central to Javanese culture, often conveying moral teachings. Myths about sacred sites or figures, such as Ratu Kidul (Queen of the Southern Sea), remind people of the importance of maintaining harmony.
8. Values of Simplicity and Harmony
The Javanese people tend to value simplicity and avoid excess, striving to maintain harmony in their social relations, with nature, and in daily life.
9. Javanese Language
The Javanese language features levels of formality ("undha usuk basa")—from "krama" (very polite) to "madya" (moderately polite) and "ngoko" (informal). Language use reflects respect toward the person addressed.
10. Gotong Royong (Mutual Cooperation)
Togetherness and mutual assistance are prominent in Javanese culture, as reflected in various activities, including community service, social gatherings, and other collaborative efforts.

These characteristics reflect Javanese culture's emphasis on social and spiritual values, maintaining balance among people, nature, and the spiritual realm. However, in this study, only the characteristics considered still relevant will be referred to as part of Javanese cultural behaviors:

- Hierarchical Social Stratification
Javanese society emphasizes respect for hierarchy, including within family and community structures. Respect for elders or leaders is a fundamental principle.
- Mysticism and Spirituality
The Javanese maintain spiritual beliefs, including the practice of "kejawen," which encompasses philosophies and rituals related to the universe, balance, and inner peace.
- Ceremonies and Traditional Rites
Various traditions, such as "selametan," "nyadran," "mitoni," and "tedhak siten," as well as death rituals, play a crucial role in preserving culture and imparting values to the community.



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- Traditional Arts
Arts such as wayang kulit, gamelan, Javanese dance, and batik are essential in conveying moral values and life philosophies.
- Javanese Language
The formal language structure demonstrates respect for interlocutors, utilizing varying levels of language to convey politeness.
- Gotong Royong
Togetherness and the spirit of mutual help are highly valued, as evident in collective activities such as community service and social events.

3. Soyo as a Social Ritual

In Javanese culture, "soyo" refers to a voluntary form of mutual cooperation, known as gotong royong, where community members assist neighbors or relatives with major projects, such as building or repairing homes (Basir & Prajawati, 2021; Prasetyo, 2022). This tradition embodies strong social solidarity, where neighbors work together without immediate compensation, reinforcing community bonds and mutual support. The principle behind *soyo* is that those who assist today can expect help in return when they need it in the future. This practice preserves social unity and promotes collective well-being, aligning with Javanese values of *guyub* (community closeness) and *rukun* (harmony and mutual help) (Suwignyo, 2019).

The practice of *soyo* typically arises from a request for help by someone in need of assistance, often for home construction or repair. Participation is voluntary, and neighbors are approached directly to offer support. However, absence after being asked carries certain social consequences. Non-participation in *soyo* can bring about social repercussions, which, although varying between communities, generally involve social sanctions rather than material penalties.

The specific sanctions for non-participation may include:

1. Public Shaming
Those who don't participate in *soyo* may face ridicule or become the subject of gossip among neighbors, which can result in feelings of shame or a negative perception within the community. Neighbors may interpret the absence as a sign of a lack of care or responsibility toward others.
2. Loss of Respect
Non-participation can reduce trust and respect from the community, as *soyo* embodies not just physical aid but a commitment to community values. Individuals who rarely engage in *soyo* may be seen as lacking in *guyub* and *rukun* and risk social exclusion.
3. Reciprocal Absence
Another form of social sanction is reciprocity, where those who do not participate in *soyo* may not receive assistance when they are in need. This aligns with the Javanese concept of *ngunduh wohe pangeti* (reaping what one sows), whereby mutual help is expected and reciprocated within the community.

These social consequences are primarily non-material, as Javanese society tends to prioritize harmony. Rather than being punitive, these sanctions encourage collective awareness of the importance of unity and mutual support, which are vital to the community's social fabric.



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4. The fading of participation

The resurgence of the "soyo" culture in Summersuko Village, Wagir District, Malang Regency, has also been seen in nearby villages, especially among communities with agrarian lifestyles. Most of these residents still rely on managing natural resources, such as agriculture and plantations, although many now exhibit behaviors that reflect those of urban or city dwellers.

Living alongside the people of Summersuko Village for almost 10 years has provided a clear picture of changing cultural behaviors. This change is especially notable among those with Javanese cultural backgrounds, which is evident in daily life.

Over the past decade, soyo activities have occurred fewer than 20 times, including when the author built a house in Ngemplak Hamlet, Summersuko Village, an event that took place spontaneously. For most soyo events, the homeowner or organizer provides the building materials for constructing the house, while the neighbors, who are invited or "tojon" (signifying a direct invitation), bring their tools to work as craftsmen.

One of the largest soyo activities was for the construction of Cak Wito's house in Glagahombo Hamlet, Summersuko Village. The materials, such as river stones for the foundation, had been collected for over five years. Other durable materials, like teak wood sourced from Cak Wito's own yard, were stored for almost four years to allow for drying. Approximately a year or two before construction, materials such as sand, bricks, tiles, and other supplies were gradually gathered, with the final preparations taking place one month prior. The event took place in August 2020, following Indonesia's Independence Day on the 17th, with neighbors invited to join by "tojon." In this tradition, neighbors receive food and snacks along with an invitation to participate in the soyo on Saturday, August 15, 2020, which coincided with the Javanese "Pon" market day.

The event was held on a Saturday because this is often the only day neighbors are free to attend, as many work in urban areas or factories. As Cak Wito, the homeowner, explained: "If we held soyo on a day other than Saturday, many neighbors couldn't come because they work outside the village or in Wagir. Even with a month's notice, it's still challenging to gather neighbors because many are occupied. It's tough now, but this event helps support those who can't afford to build a house."

According to Pak Wo, the hamlet head, and Pak Inggi, the village head, soyo is increasingly difficult to organize because many villagers no longer work in agriculture, preferring instead to work as laborers or craftsmen in the city. This situation has made it hard to maintain community mutual assistance, including soyo.

With soyo now rare, it's clear that community participation in mutual aid activities is diminishing. This loss of soyo reflects the decline of self-reliance and voluntary participation in local development, posing a major challenge for communities seeking support to improve their well-being.

The difficulty in organizing soyo reflects the broader challenge of fostering community participation, making it harder for residents to secure communal support to improve their well-being. As soyo fades, so too does the spirit of self-reliance and volunteerism in development efforts. Additionally, enforcing social sanctions has become challenging, as limited time and opportunity restrict neighbors' ability to participate in soyo. As livelihoods shift increasingly toward urbanization, it is likely that this organic form of participation, rooted in Javanese



culture, will disappear. One of the main reasons is the changing occupations of the community members.

5. Conclusion

The case of *soyo* in Summersuko Village illustrates how traditional Javanese social rituals serve as mechanisms for maintaining social cohesion, mutual trust, and community resilience. The declining participation in *soyo* mirrors broader socio-cultural transitions occurring in rural Java, where the pressures of modernization, migration, and changing livelihoods reshape community dynamics. While *soyo* continues to hold symbolic meaning, its practical function as a form of mutual aid has diminished, replaced by more individualized patterns of living and working.

This transformation challenges local communities to find new forms of cooperation that adapt to contemporary conditions while preserving the essential Javanese values of *rukun*, *guyub*, and *gotong royong*. Revitalizing *soyo* may not only strengthen local solidarity but also reinforce the social capital necessary for sustainable rural development.

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